

DRAMAS

Short (C)

FOR THE USE OF

K

YOUNG LADIES.



BIRMINGHAM:

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MDCCXCII.

By J. Short, a Lady
See the end of the book



THE
FORTUNATE DISAPPOINTMENT.

A



TO THE
REV. GEORGE COTTON, L. L. D.
DEAN OF CHESTER:

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE INSCRIBED, IN
TESTIMONY OF THE HIGH ESTEEM, RESPECT
AND GRATITUDE, WITH WHICH

I AM,

HIS OBLIGED,

AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

C. SHORT.

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P R E F A C E.

THESE little Dramas were written for a Society of Young Ladies, in whose welfare and improvement I am warmly interested; and as they have proved beneficial to this small circle, in promoting the habit of speaking with grace and propriety, I conceived they might be useful to others in similar situations, and therefore determined to present them to the public.

THE
FORTUNATE DISAPPOINTMENT.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mrs. VERNON, a Widow Lady.

Miss HARRIET VERNON, aged 18,
Miss ELIZA VERNON, aged 17,
Miss MARIA VERNON, aged 16, } Three Daughters
to Mrs. Vernon.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH, a Widow Lady, sister to the
late Mr. Vernon.

Miss CAROLINE MOLESWORTH,
aged 18,
Miss AMELIA MOLESWORTH,
aged 16, } Daughter to Mrs.
Molesworth.

Mrs. FRANKS, a Teywoman.

Servants, &c.

PROLOGUE

TO THE

FORTUNATE DISAPPOINTMENT.

TO teach our ductile youth the pleasing art,
Whose powers persausive steal into the heart,
When graceful motion, and when accent just,
Prove faithful ever to the writer's trust,
No idle aim, no light design betrays,
For virtue smiles on generous thirst of praise;
And oft exterior elegance we find
Gives added influence to the virtuous mind;
Since *warmest* glow the emulative fires,
If, while our Sense *approves*, our Taste *admires*.

But more important, more exalted views,
Prompt the kind efforts of our moral muse;
That still the youthful maid each fault may scorn,
From cold reserve, or baser malice born;
Bid fair ingenuousness each thought reveal,
To the mild guardians of her studied weal,
Whom long experience has empower'd to know,
When fleeting pleasures lead to lasting woe.

Thus while, by them forewarn'd, we shun the
bowers,

Where serpents lurk beneath the gaudy flowers,
Oft shall their cares the passing hour employ,
To ope for us each source of genuine joy,
Point the safe track where life's worst perils cease,
"The ways of pleasantness the paths of peace!"



THE
FORTUNATE DISAPPOINTMENT.

ACT I.

*Scene opens and discovers Miss Harriet and
Maria Vernon dressing Bowpots.*

HARRIET.

HAVE you seen my mother since breakfast? She promised to join us in the garden, and determine the situation of the hot-house and green-house which my poor father planned before his death. Heigh ho!

MARIA.

Why that sigh? — Never surely was so wonderful a change as that wrought in you, by having an accomplished and handsome

husband provided for you, and twenty thousand pounds to give him. Whilst you considered yourself as possessing only five thousand, you were the gayest (I had almost said the giddiest) of the three; your vivacity would have bordered on levity, had it not been chastened by a native delicacy which checked you on the first approaches to impropriety.

HARRIET.

I think even my dear Maria's excessive partiality, could scarcely vindicate me from the imputation of levity, was I not thoughtful in my present situation. Edwin was certainly what you say when he went abroad, both handsome and accomplished, the former is in my eyes of no great estimation, the latter would rather improve by travelling, but I doubt whether his morals would greatly benefit, and in that respect he had at least nothing to lose; but here

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comes Eliza; let us drop the subject, I know not why; it is to her an unpleasant one I am sure.

ELIZA.

My mother requests you will attend her in the garden, where she wants your opinion about the new building.

HARRIET.

I wish she wou'd dispense with it; both her taste and judgment are far superior to mine, or indeed to almost any one's, in my opinion; but, were it otherwise, it is a matter of indifference to me where it is placed, or whether it be built at all.

ELIZA.

You are the person who are to enjoy it, (*she sighs,*) it is therefore right you shou'd determine it: besides, it will be disrespectful to my mother, not to obey her summons.

HARRIET.

I go instantly; will you accompany me?

ELIZA.

Maria will, I have been walking till too much tired already.

[Exeunt Harriet and Maria.]

ELIZA.

She little suspects the anguish that rends my heart, or she would not thus urge me to witness preparations for her nuptials, with the man who engaged my own affections, before we had any suspicion of the insurmountable bar my father's will would form to our union. I am justly though severely punished for suffering any intreaties to draw from me a confession of attachment to him, without the sanction of my parents; had I made a friend of my honoured mother, as I ought to have

done, she might possibly have persuaded my father to have left my cousin at liberty in his choice: at least it would certainly have led to the declaration of his intentions, respecting Edwin's marriage with my sister; the knowledge of which, at that early period, wou'd soon have reconciled me to look on him as a brother—but now I shudder at the thought—how complicated the distress into which I have plunged myself by a deviation from the paths of rectitude—my tears flow for the sufferings of my Edwin; how wretched too wou'd my Harriet be should she discover our ill-fated attachment,—with what tenderness wou'd the dear girl sooth my sorrows, were they of a nature to be revealed to her; but, alas! I have deprived myself of every resource by my disingenuous concealment. From Caroline I shall hear of Edwin, but her officiousness and zeal distress me, and her imprudence

subjects me to continual apprehensions of a discovery.

Enter Mrs. Vernon.

Mrs. VERNON.

Why, Eliza, did you not accompany your sisters into the garden? You know not the anxiety you occasion by thus indulging a love of solitude.

ELIZA.

I had taken a long walk before, and was rather fatigued, or should have accepted their invitation. I know not that I am particularly fond of being alone, on the contrary you once remarked I was too fond of company — there is no such thing as pleasing I think.

Mrs. VERNON.

Be careful how you give way to a petulance that your own heart will condemn,

with more severity than I am inclined to do: I am less offended than grieved at it, for I have observed a change in your temper, (which used to be remarkably placid,) and a solicitude to be alone, that has given me inexpressible concern. I know your mind to be superior to any kind of jealousy arising from the distribution of fortune in favour of Harriet — yet it is since the death of your father, that the alteration has taken place. You well know that fifteen thousand of the twenty left her, is on condition that she accepts of Edwin for a husband, and therefore is rather a compliment to him than to her; and that in case she rejects him it is to be divided between you and Maria, in addition to your five thousand, so that she would be much worse provided for than either of you: yet I am sure this will have no weight with her in the acceptance of him, should she —

ELIZA.

Torture me not, my dear Madam, by a suggestion so hateful, as that I cou'd envy the fortune of any one, especially that of either of my *sisters*, whom I love with the tenderest affection! with whom I would joyfully share my last shilling!—besides, the inheritance to which I am through my father's bounty entitled, infinitely exceeds my wishes; my views are much more limited than my fortune! (*She draws her hand over her eyes to conceal a tear.*)

Mrs. VERNON. (*Taking her hand.*)

Tell me, my beloved child, the cause of that tear you wou'd fain conceal? Every thing tends to confirm my apprehensions that you have some hidden source of uneasiness! of what nature it can be I am totally at a loss to guess! relieve the solicitude of a mother, whose happiness is

inseparably connected with that of her children! repose your sorrows in my bosom, they flow not from a guilty source I feel assured! and to indiscretion who shall dare be severe amidst their own numerous imperfections! nor can you fear it from her, who has never exercised the authority of a parent, without tempering it with the tenderness of an affectionate friend! who has promoted all your innocent gratifications, and sought rather to lead than impel your choice to such as wou'd please not only in the present but on a retrospect.

ELIZA.

You are all goodness, my dearest Madam, nor is it possible for a daughter to be more sensible of your indulgent tenderness, or more grateful for it than I am: forgive, I entreat you, the peevishness and injustice of my remark, which I shall never recollect without contrition; it

would have been highly improper to any parent, but to such a mother is utterly inexcusable: banish too, I beseech you, from your mind, every suspicion of my being uneasy; what cause can I have, blessed as I am in the love and tenderness of all my connections? My spirits have, I own, been of late unusually depressed, and the apprehensions of your observing, and being rendered unhappy by it, has induced me sometimes to avoid the company of friends so justly dear to me. Have you heard yet from my aunt when she intends coming to us?

Mrs. VERNON.

I am in daily expectation of a letter, and have no doubt she will fix an early period, with the hope of accelerating your cousin's marriage with your sister, which she looks upon as a certain event, for viewing him through the medium of

parental affection, his virtues only are visible, she has therefore no apprehensions of his being rejected.

ELIZA. (*With emotion.*)

Have you any, Madam? (*Endeavouring to compose herself.*) Unless he is much altered since he went abroad, he scarcely needs the aid of partiality to render him agreeable.

Mrs. VERNON.

I am far from being clear in that matter: your father's views were then unknown to any one except myself; you therefore did not observe him so closely as I did;—but as I am speaking only from conjecture, I do not consider myself at liberty to proceed, and desire you will be strictly silent as to what has passed. Your sisters are, I suppose, getting ready for their engagement to dinner at Mr. Seymour's? You had better hasten to them or you will

be late; I will go and give some necessary orders, and shall be ready by the time the coach comes to the door.

[Exit Mrs. Vernon.]

ELIZA. (*In a musing posture.*)

What cou'd my mother mean by her conjectures?—She cou'd not suspect our attachment, or she would not have spoken to me on the subject:—surely she has not observed in Harriet a preference of William? She has never acknowledged any; yet I own I have thought I cou'd perceive in their looks when they met, a something that they sought to conceal, not only from others, but even from themselves:—alas, I rather speak my wishes than my conviction that it is so—how happy might we then all be; for to my Edwin's generous heart and ardent affection, the surrender of half his estate wou'd hardly be deemed too much!—surely she can have no doubt of his worth!—

impossible! — I am bewildered in doubt and anxiety, yet dare not seek an explanation lest my emotion shou'd betray me:— infatuated being, thus to exclude the pilot at the very moment of venturing on a sea, where the whirlpool of passion is ready to ingulph, the shoals of inexperience to endanger, and the rocks of indiscretion and presumption to wreck my peace!

Enter Servant.

Miss Vernon desired me to tell you it is near three, and she fears my mistress will be displeased to have the carriage wait.

ELIZA.

I did not imagine it had been so late, if you will assist me I shall be ready in half an hour.

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

hope! — I am bewildered in doubt
and struggling with not one explanation
— how many questions should I bring me —
I have tried to bring this to explain the past
of the movement of venturing on a sea,
where the whirlpool of passion is ready to
in gulph, — how much for experience to
admit, — how much for the indignation and
how much for the love of truth.
I have tried to bring this to explain the past
of the movement of venturing on a sea,
where the whirlpool of passion is ready to
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admit, — how much for the indignation and
how much for the love of truth.

ACT II.

SCENE A PARLOUR.

*Mrs. Vernon and her three Daughters sitting
after Dinner with a Desert before them.*

MARIA.

WHAT a pleasant day we passed yesterday, and what a cheerful family Mr. Seymour's is; I am sorry they are going to Cheltenham so soon, I could much have wished my cousins to have come before their departure.

HARRIET.

They are very agreeable; but my aunt visits them in town you know, they will therefore have frequent opportunities of seeing each other in winter.

MARIA.

There may probably be frequent intercourse between their chairs, but what pleasure can that afford to rational minds; even the very idea of a sociable visit is in London treated with ridicule.

Mrs. VERNON.

Your opinion is much changed within a few months; it was but last autumn that you were so importunate to accompany us thither.

MARIA.

I was so, but believe me that one season has satisfied me, and was it not for the play, the opera, and some few other amusements, I shou'd not care whether I ever entered London again: when I was so urgent to go, I had no idea that one must either be really, or apparently absurd, that every thing natural wou'd be deem'd ridiculous—

that whilst in the pursuit of pleasure, you must shut up every avenue to it, and in order to be thought something, must become nothing—a mere automaton—every one is expected to preserve such a strict conformity to fashionable manners, that I think it wou'd be a good plan to have one of those engines made as one's representative, rather than submit to the fatigue and insipidity of London visits.

HARRIET.

Maria has not yet forgiven the ridicule she incurred by her description of what she call'd sociable visits, such as she shou'd like in London: her conversation was addrested to a young party of sitters-by at Mrs. Oliver's rout, but some of the elder ladies at the card tables over heard it, and though politeness restrained the expression of their mirth, their looks plainly indicated how perfectly ludicrous such a plan of

visiting appeared to any one who had lived in the eighteenth century.

MARIA.

Well, it might be so, but I still cannot comprehend what there was ridiculous in saying I shou'd like London if it was more sociable; that I was fond of visits which included tea and supper, and where cheerful and edifying conversation, rather than cards, furnished the entertainment. I am glad that I am got back to Belmont, where one may venture to express pleasure when it is felt, and where refinement does not exclude happiness.

Enter a Servant, who gives Mrs. Vernon a Letter, she reads it with agitation.

HARRIET. *(With emotion and tenderness.)*

Your letter contains nothing disagreeable, I hope, my dear Madam? you seem agitated by the contents.

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Mrs. VERNON.

I am much surprised to find that your aunt and cousins will probably be here this evening; nor is surprise the only emotion I feel.

MARIA.

It is very odd they did not give you earlier information; my aunt used to write a fortnight at least previous to her leaving London.

Mrs. VERNON.

The suddenness of it has awakened my apprehensions lest any thing disagreeable should have occasioned it, for at the close of it she mentions having received letters from abroad, but defers communicating the contents till her arrival.

HARRIET. (*With eagerness.*)

From which of her sons, my dear Madam?

B 2

MRS. VERNON.

She says no more than I have related, but shou'd she have cause of uneasiness from any of her children I shall most truly sympathise with her, for few people have had so large a portion of affliction; hitherto it has only served to give lustre to her virtues by calling them into action, and placing them in a more conspicuous point of view, and such, I dare venture to affirm, will be the effect of every new trial to which she may be exposed, for though she possesses a keenness of sensibility that was never, I believe, exceeded, and very rarely equalled, it is happily united with such a firmness of mind, and inherent love of rectitude, that her judgment is in no danger of being misled by it; in short, her whole life has been regulated by principle, and when that is the basis of right conduct, there is every possible security for its continuance. Poor

woman! I wish the behaviour of her daughter Caroline may not occasion her many a pang: there is a duplicity about her that wou'd make me very unhappy were she my child, and which I am sure her mother often observes with anguish.—But we are wasting time; you at least Harriet shou'd go, and order you aunt's room prepared for her, and see that every thing is arranged in the manner you know she likes it.

[Exit Harriet.]

Mrs. VERNON.

I fear I have awakened painful apprehensions in the breast of my dear girl, but shou'd they be groundless, the impression will soon yield to pleasurable ones, which will be still brighter from the present shade of doubt that envelopes her prospects—or shou'd any thing disagreeable have arisen, (of which I own my

fears,) this little preparation may be of use to weaken its force.

MARIA.

Perhaps tenderness to my sister may have been my aunt's motive for not saying from which of her sons, though indeed it may be from William, who she knows stands high in all our good graces.

Mrs. VERNON.

It may be so ; but when I reflect how connected with the happiness of a beloved child, the conduct of Edwin may be, my hopes and fears naturally center there ; and indeed from William there can be little to apprehend, after having passed that dangerous period from eighteen to twenty three in the army, not only without injury to his principles, but in such a way as to secure the esteem of the wise and good, and the respect and admiration even of

the gay and dissipated, whose manners he censured rather by the strictness of his own morals, than any avowed disapprobation of theirs. He is indeed a most excellent young man.

MARIA.

What must we do about Mrs. Franks at the toy-shop? we told her we would call upon her this evening, to purchase a few things of which we are in want.

Mrs. VERNON.

You cannot be out, and if you put it off till another day you may enlarge your party.

MARIA.

That I would most willingly, but her stay of a month (which she never exceeds) expires to-night: should you have any objection to my writing a note, and desir-

ing her, if convenient, to bring the articles we want this evening? and if my cousins are come they may perhaps make it better worth her while.

Mrs. VERNON.

I can have none, for she is a very sensible well-behaved woman, and as it is some distance, you may name her coming to tea, which will rest her. Eliza will go and see if she can help her sister; and if you will dispatch your note by Thomas, you may join me in my room, and we will go and visit some of our poor neighbours, to whom our attention may be useful, at all events it will be comfortable, and therefore is indispensable.

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE A PARLOUR.

*Enter Mrs. Vernon and three Daughters,
Mrs. Molesworth and two Daughters.*

Mrs. VERNON. (*Speaking as she enters.*)

THOUGH ever a most welcome visitor, you have contrived to enhance the pleasure your company gives by being here so early, for the period of expectation is very tedious when waiting for the arrival of friends.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

I must disclaim all merit in so doing, it was self gratification that rendered me

so expeditious ; I was impatient to be with you and my dear nieces.

AMELIA.

My mother wou'd not either stop to refresh herself, or suffer us to do it, she was in such haste to reach you, so if you please (*turning to Harriet*) to give us a little tea we shall be very glad of it, for Caroline and I are not so accustomed to country air as to live on it, and therefore cannot well do with such diet.

HARRIET. (*Rings the bell.*)

I am glad you reminded me, for I seem to have forgotten every thing in the pleasure of seeing you.

Enter Servant.

Mrs. VERNON.

Let us have tea as quick as possible.

[*Exit Servant.*]

They all seat themselves ; Harriet begins to place the Cups ; Servant enters with the Urn.

Mrs. VERNON.

You need not wait.

[Exit Servant.]

Mrs. VERNON.

You mentioned in your letter, sister, having heard from abroad ; my nephews are both well, I hope ? Is there any mention of their return ?

Mrs. MOLESWORTH. *(With a sigh.)*

Edwin has been slightly indisposed, but is recovered ; his coming home is uncertain at present ; but we will defer the subject till to-morrow, for my journey has fatigued me more than usual.

CAROLINE.

I expected it would be too much for you, and therefore urged you to rest a night at Oxford with Amelia, and let your woman and myself come on, to prevent my aunt's being alarmed.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

You were very kind and considerate, my dear, but I shall soon lose all remembrance of it, in such society.

Enter Servant.

Mrs. Franks is here, Madam.

Mrs. VERNON.

Desire her to walk in.

AMELIA.

Who is Mrs. Franks.

Mrs. VERNON.

She is a very sensible woman, and a singular character; her original station in life was genteel; till the death of an extravagant and worthless husband; when she found her circumstances much embarrassed, but being of an active disposition, instead of submitting to live in the very confined way she must have done, she determined to pursue her present plan of improving them, which wou'd at the same time be an inducement to take proper exercise. Her disappointments in life have not soured her temper, but they have shewn her the world in its most unfavourable point of view, that has rather given her a turn which, to those unacquainted with her, is mistaken for satire; but she never indulges it except when justly merited: I have often been amused with her, but never offended.

MARIA.

I think you once saw her here before ; she makes an annual visit to this and many of the adjacent towns, with jewellery, toys, and trinkets, and stays a month at each ; her time here is expired, and as we wanted some trifles, and were unwilling to risk the being out when you arrived, we desired she would bring them hither.

Enter Mrs. Franks and a Servant, bringing in her Box, which she places on a Table.

Mrs. VERNON.

How do you do, Mrs. Franks? I am glad to see you look so well ; you are just in time for a cup of tea, which will refresh you after your walk.

Mrs. FRANKS.

You are very kind, Madam, but I drank tea before I set out, as I wished to return

as soon as possible, having many things still to pack up, previous to my removal to-morrow: but I will sit down till the ladies have done.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

You seem to have finished, Caroline, if there is any thing you wou'd like to look at.

CAROLINE.

Country goods are in general vile things; but I forgot to get a tooth-pick case before I left town, have you any with you here? (*Mrs. Franks shews some, which she looks at and pushes from her with rudeness.*) These are horrible; there is only one decent one amongst them, and that has no looking-glass.

Mrs. FRANKS.

Here is a neat one with a glass.

CAROLINE. (*Examining it.*)

Shocking; was I to produce it I shou'd expect to be asked if it was one of my grandfather's snuff-boxes that I had converted to that use.

Mrs. FRANKS.

I am sorry I have none that will please you, Madam: for my own part, I agree with you they wou'd all be better if fitted up with mirrors; they might certainly then be made very useful, to shew the ladies how perfectly irresistible sweetness and affability renders them; not the finest bloom that paint can give will ever vie (at least after half an hour's observation) with the fascinating tints, that benignity and gentleness diffuse over the countenance.

AMELIA.

I want a neat pocket-book with instruments.

Mrs. FRANKS.

Here are great variety.

AMELIA. (*Looking them over.*)

I like this very well, but there is a leaf wanting for memorandums.

Mrs. FRANKS.

That, Madam, is purposely left out, that it may be adapted to the taste of the purchaser : I have white ivory for the generality — and common afses-skin for those who prefer it ; but for the very few — I have indeed a treasure — leaves of the identical afs that wandered three whole days in search of his master and friend, without tasting food till he had found him. — Of that very afs, whose adventures have been so pathetically related by one, well acquainted with every avenue to the human heart — who must excite emotion even in the unfeeling, and

melt into graceful tenderness the breast of sensibility. There will be a peculiar advantage in furnishing your book with one of these leaves, for if you properly estimate it, you will be careful that each record shall evince a heart in unison with every benevolent, humane, and virtuous emotion.

AMELIA.

Put me one of them into this pocket-book, if you please, and I will pay for it altogether; what is the price?

Mrs. FRANKS.

One guinea. (*Amelia lays down the money, and puts the book in her pocket.*)

HARRIET.

I requested you to bring some trinkets for a watch.

Mrs. FRANKS.

I have, Madam; there are many that I think will please you: give me leave to shew you this, which is both new and curious: on the outside is a small but distinct and well executed landscape, in the centre of which stands a temple, the motto—*sacrè a la vertue*; at the entrance there is a small key-hole which opens like the lock of a pocket-book, and the whole upper part, as you may perceive, flies back; the inside contains an accurate compass, only instead of being quartered with the four cardinal points, the four cardinal virtues are substituted.

Mrs. VERNON.

It must be curious, give me leave to look how they are arranged; (*she takes it in her hand*;) O I see Prudence represents the North, Temperance the South, Fortitude the East, and Justice the West.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

As usual, they have treated Prudence as a frigid virtue, but am doubtful whether there are any that ought to rank before it.

Mrs. FRANKS.

The inventor of this trinket, of whom I have some knowledge, was quite of that opinion, Madam; for upon enquiry why he had thus disposed them, he replied, he placed Prudence there, the North being the regulating point for all the others, so Prudence regulates, or as it were concentrates in itself all other virtues, for no one can justly be denominated prudent, who violates the most inconsiderable duty, at least every such violation may be reckoned as an exception to his general conduct.

ELIZA.

Have you another of them?

Mrs. FRANKS.

This is the only one ever made.

ELIZA.

Then indeed, Harriet, you shou'd spare that to me, I stand more in need of such a memento than you do.

HARRIET.

That I cannot admit, but if you like it, accept it as a token of sisterly affection.

ELIZA.

Thank you, my dear, and shou'd I find myself on the verge of error, I will look at it, when the remembrance of the donor will tend to recall me, and assist my entrance into the temple.

MARIA.

Have you any good devices in hair for lockets or bracelets?

Mrs. FRANKS.

I cannot boast of any great variety in that way; here is a new one, emblematical of friendship: Pythias mounted on the scaffold, his countenance expressive of eagerness to meet a death which was to save the life of his friend; and Damon just appearing, his horse at full speed, to rescue Pythias from the fatal stroke.

MARIA. (*Turning to Amelia.*)

The design is certainly novel for a picture, but it is no more a new plan to make man the hero of every story that is founded on merit, than it is to pourtray woman as the principal figure in every thing that is either ludicrous or contemptible: if any one is disposed to degrade the human species, or place it in a ridiculous point of view, there are numberless instances ready, each taken from female characters; on the other hand, if desirous

of exalting it, the illustrations of excellence are as speedily procured, but they are never sought for except among the lords of the creation! Why is this? surely there are many virtues that pertain as much to the female as the male character; and in the strength and steadiness of our attachments I do not think we are at all their inferiors.

AMELIA.

You, surely, my dear, might cease to wonder at such partial representations, did you recollect that the recorders of them are those very lords, who (were you to impute to them illiberality in thus invariably exalting their own sex, and debasing ours,) wou'd scarcely ever pardon you for the imputation, though their resentment wou'd rather evince its justice, than tend to a refutation.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Why, my dears, you seem both preparing to seriously enter the lists as the champions of your sex, but let me advise you to desist from the attempt, and in this respect to take mankind as you find them, for though the reformation of the world may be a very laudable desire, each individual wou'd do well to begin with himself to promote it: the ambition of a woman ought to be to merit praise, not to procure it; the virtues of our sex are most of them of a retired nature, and flourish best, and most securely, in the shade; eagerness for fame, is a meteor that has misled many, and it will in general hold true, that such as are most solicitous for it, are those whose pretensions, if examined, wou'd prove to be worst founded.

Mrs. VERNON.

The young people seem to have done, Mrs. Franks; and as you are in haste, you

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had better let a servant assist you. (*She rings.*)

Mrs. FRANKS.

I thank you, Madam, my things are all put up.

Enter a Servant.

Mrs. VERNON.

Assist Mrs. Franks, and carry her box for her.

Mrs. FRANKS.

I wish you a good night, ladies, and am much obliged to you.

ALL.

I wish you a good night.

[*Exeunt Mrs. Franks and Servant.*]

C

Mrs. VERNON.

As the evening is fine, perhaps a walk
would be agreeable to your cousins, my
dears.

CAROLINE and AMELIA.

I should like it much.

HARRIET.

We will go then and get our things,
and accompany you directly.

[Exeunt all the young Ladies.]

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

When I declined answering your enquiry respecting my sons, my dear sister, it was because my nieces and daughters were present: I long to unburthen my oppressed spirits, by communicating my sorrows to you, yet dread to do it, because you will so keenly feel them — you will grieve for our Harriet, for me, for my

William —— and heart-rending thought
—— you must despise my Edwin.

Mrs. VERNON. (*With impatience.*)

Speak instantly, I entreat you, a thousand apprehensions torture me at once.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Alas! they can scarcely exceed the reality, but not to keep you in suspense; I had written, as you know, two months ago, to Edwin, to say, that I wished him now to return, that he might, in compliance with his uncle's will, prepare to take the name of Vernon, and wait on his cousin for her consent, assuring him, at the same time, that he had a friend and advocate in you, and that I had every reason to hope he would receive such an answer from Harriet as would insure him a far greater prize than the large inheritance which my generous brother had

bequeathed him; that you wou'd, I believe, take a house in the neighbourhood, for yourself and other daughters, and intended, if the match took place, to compliment him with this, though left to you for your life. To William I wrote at the same time, informing him that I hoped a few months from the date of my letter wou'd bring about an event that wou'd confirm the happiness of all parties, and requested his attendance as a respect due to his brother.

Mrs. VERNON. (*Agitated.*)

I will spare you the pain of repeating his answer — he declines the connection.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

He cannot do otherwise — read that letter.

Mrs. VERNON.*(Reads it to herself, then exclaims)*

Married these three months! — What could be his inducement for concealing it so long? I shou'd have supposed the certainty of renouncing all right to his uncle's fortune wou'd have weigh'd with him at least to have offered himself, had it been only for the chance of being rejected, and am truly thankful (whatever were his motives) that he did not, for I have long suspected that my Harriet has been less happy since this affair has been in agitation, she has certainly been less cheerful — and now indeed I have only to hope, that the match was disagreeable to her.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

I wonder you did not endeavour to know her sentiments on a subject of so much importance.

Mrs. VERNON.

It wou'd have been premature, ere Edwin's return; for had she then disliked him,—I knew she wou'd ingenuously have avowed it, — she was secure of not being urged on a point of so much consequence to her future peace: I intended too being a close observer of them both, and had I seen any thing unfavourable in him, or that would have justified apprehensions for her happiness in the connection, I wou'd have pointed it out, and advised her with that tenderness and solicitude which none but an affectionate parent can feel, to relinquish the fifteen thousand pounds which you know was left her on the same conditions that Mr. Vernon's estate of two thousand a-year was left to Edwin, if she rejected him, it was to be shared between her two sisters, and if he declined it, (which I fancy poor Mr. Vernon thought an impossibility,) the estate was to go to William, without

any annexed condition except that of taking the name of Vernon.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

How are all my hopes blasted, at the very instant as it were of completion! and I have now only to wish, that my beloved Harriet may regard with no worse sentiment than indifference, the man who has justly merited her contempt—and that he, poor infatuated young man, may never know what an inestimable gem he has lost.

Mrs. VERNON.

When the young people return, I think I had better take the earliest opportunity of speaking to Harriet, on a subject that engrosses my thoughts too much, to leave me any enjoyment, till I know her sentiments; yet am I not so absorbed by it, but that I can sympathise most sincerely

in all your sorrows ; that William shou'd have occasioned you uneasinefs, surprises as much as grieves me ; in him I was confident you wou'd have comfort ; for I thought him a most exemplary young man.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

And praised be that Power that has made him such, you may still, my dear sister, love and esteem him ; the very source of his unhappinefs exalts him, at the same time that his sufferings merit and claim our sympathy.

Mrs. VERNON.

May I enquire, without impertinence, of what nature it can be ?

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

You hurt me by the implied supposition that it is possible I shou'd seek to conceal

any thing from a friend, to whom my inmost thoughts are open. My dear William, in answer to my request to see him, entreats me to dispense with his attendance, and to apologise to his brother: but adds, he cannot summons fortitude to witness his nuptials with the only woman on earth, with whom he cou'd have been happy,

Mrs. VERNON.

I am all astonishment: had you any idea of this attachment?

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Not any, I give you my word, that wou'd warrant my forming an opinion, though I own, when I have seen them together, I have observed an emotion in each that I cou'd not account for, and watched them narrowly, that, had any thing appeared, I might have instantly apprised you of it.

Mrs. VERNON.

One perplexity succeeds another; I own I was not without suspicion, that between William and Eliza there might have been a growing attachment, for she is still more altered than her sister; though since the dear girl knows I have observed it with anxiety, she has taken infinite pains to conceal it.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Wou'd it not be adviseable to mention the subject to Harriet before her? and I will observe her countenance, which may lead to a discovery of what nature her uneasiness may be, for you are certainly mistaken in your present conjectures.

Mrs. VERNON.

I think it will, both from the reasons you assign, and that it will have less the appearance of preparation, which of itself

may alarm Harriet, who was, I saw, all attention, when I enquired after your sons.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Here they come, shall I send my girls out of the way?

Mrs. VERNON.

I think, if you please, they had better be present.

Enter the Five young Ladies.

CAROLINE.

Why, aunt, I expected to have seen the stove and the green-house quite completed by this time?

Mrs. VERNON.

I did intend it, but was disappointed by the workmen, and now I know not whether they will ever be built.

MARIA.

Why so, Mamma?

Mrs. VERNON.

Circumstances are changed, (*looking significantly at Harriet, who also watches her attentively.*) I have no intention of quitting this house at present, and, whilst I inhabit it, shall want no addition; we have passed many delightful hours here, and I trust my children will none of them desire any change. What say you, my Harriet?

HARRIET. (*With emotion.*)

I can form no idea of more tranquil happiness than I have experienced here; but why that question so significantly? I am sure you have some particular reason for your enquiry; condescend to explain it, for suspense is extremely painful.

DISAPPOINTMENT. 61

Mrs. VERNON. (*Taking her hand.*)

Edwin, my Harriet —

HARRIET. (*Interrupting her.*)

Rejects me!

Mrs. VERNON.

Not so, my dear — but he has formed a connection with another, to whom he has given his hand.

ELIZA.

Gracious Heaven — Edwin married!
(*she staggers to her aunt, who supports her from falling.*)

HARRIET. (*Running to her Sister.*)

Let not your affectionate heart, my beloved Eliza, feel one pang on my account — I am not much obliged to Edwin for the compliment he has paid me — but I am infinitely indebted to him, for

relieving my mind from an oppression that has been for some time nearly insupportable — and be assured, I am happier at this instant than I have ever been since apprised of my father's intention — rejoice, therefore, with me, instead of grieving.

ELIZA.

Restrain your tendernefs, I conjure you; the severest reproaches wou'd wound me less than such unmerited kindness — I am unworthy of regard.

Mrs. VERNON.

What means my child?

ELIZA.

O my honoured Mother! pardon, — do you too, my Harriet, pardon your guilty, but unhappy sister! and let an ingenuous, though late confession, plead for me.

Edwin, the faithless Edwin, had engaged my affections, long before my father's death : when it was known to be his wish, that an union shou'd take place between him and my sister, I urged him to think no more of me, and determined, as far as possible, to conquer my attachment. I refused to write, or hear from him any more ; but Caroline (who had letters frequently) assured me that his partiality was stronger than ever——that he was resolved never to relinquish the hope——and even threatened to endeavour to gain Harriet over to his interest : this threat drew from me a few lines, in which I assured him my resolution was unalterably fixed, never to have him ; that I shou'd ever love and esteem him as a brother, provided he pursued the plan marked out for him——that with my sister (who I thought had no intention of refusing him) he wou'd soon be made ample amends, for any little

sacrifice of inclination, especially as he might rely upon it, my word shou'd be sacred, that I never would be more than a friend to him — nor that but upon the specified conditions,

HARRIET.

How much might you have saved us all, cou'd you have prevailed with yourself to have owned the attachment — for believe me, I have suffered little short of yourself from the contest between inclination and duty — it wou'd have been no sacrifice to have relinquished Edwin, and as to the forfeiture of fortune incurred, it wou'd have been joyfully parted with in exchange for happiness to you, and myself.

Mrs. VERNON.

You cannot doubt, as matters are circumstanced, but that I am happy to find,

Edwin has without intending it, relieved you from an embarrassment, yet cannot deny the being much hurt at my children with-holding that confidence, I have taken such true pains to merit and secure.

HARRIET.

You do me injustice, my dear Madam, in suspecting me of a want of it — that I felt no partiality for my cousin is certain, but knowing your's and my father's intention, and thinking it culpable to give way to capricious prejudices against him, I had resolved to wait his return, when, had he proved such a man as I cou'd have esteem'd, and conscientiously promise to obey, I would have endeavoured to have gratified your wishes — had he, on the contrary, been unworthy, I meant to have expressed my dislike, and entreated your permission to refuse him, which, from your accustomed indulgence, I feared not to obtain, when requested on reasonable grounds.

Mrs. VERNON.

It wou'd have been granted most freely ;
and with it that warm approbation, which
such conduct so justly merits.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

How is my poor agitated bosom divided
between approbation of the propriety of
your sentiments, admiration of your vir-
tue, and deep regret at the folly of my
misguided son, in forfeiting so inestimable
a treasure.

Mrs. VERNON.

Happy shou'd I be, cou'd Eliza, like
her sister, encrease our esteem by an expla-
nation of her motives for silence.

ELIZA.

That is impossible — nor can I even
extenuate my misconduct, except by say-
ing, that I was taught to believe, when he

returned, my sister intended positively to refuse him, which kept alive (unperceived by myself) a hope that we might yet be united.

HARRIET.

You astonish me; who cou'd so mislead you?

CAROLINE.

(*Aside.*) So I must be discovered, I find, I may therefore as well have the merit of a confession. (*Aloud.*) I must with shame acknowledge the part I have acted; I had my reasons for desiring to bring about the match that has taken place, and saw no other means of doing it, than by deterring my brother from offering himself, by the assurance that he wou'd be accepted; or of keeping alive Eliza's affection for him, but by asserting that I knew — Harriet was resolved against being his wife.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Worthless Girl! what could be your motive for such treacherous and artful misrepresentations?

CAROLINE.

I hoped Eliza's attachment would in time be known, and was convinced, if ever it came to the knowledge of her sister, (to whom I durst not reveal it for fear of being discovered,) that there would be (*with a sneer*) a fine sentimental contest between them — the result of which would be a refusal from both — which would have secured to him at the same time fortune and liberty of choice, but his imprudence has defeated the scheme, and we must abide by the consequence.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

If he was so much attached to Eliza, why did he not declare it? he could not

more effectually have renounced fortune than he has done, and he might then at least have hoped to preserve the esteem of his family.

CAROLINE.

He has been egregiously impolitic, I allow, but, if you will read that letter, you will find his attachment was not of a kind to greatly endanger his repose. (*She gives a letter; Mrs. Molesworth reads it to herself.*)

ELIZA.

Will you favour me, Madam, by reading that letter, if the contents in any respect relate to me?

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Undoubtedly, my dear; for though it criminales my son, it cannot but prove an effectual antidote to your misplaced affection. (*She reads it aloud.*)

“ Your plot, my dear Caroline, was a
“ good one, but I have not patience to
“ wait its completion ; besides, I shou’d
“ fear that one or other of the sisters might
“ take compafsion on my well-feigned
“ diftrefs, and out of pure commifseration
“ make me miserable, I have therefore
“ taken the shortest road, and married
“ your friend, who, if she brings me no
“ fortune, will not abridge my pleasures,
“ which I value beyond the addition of
“ wealth, taxed as my uncle’s estate was.
“ I will try to persuade William to present
“ your swain with the rectory I had pro-
“ mised you, and then you will be no
“ loser by what you may call the impru-
“ dence of your affectionate

“ EDWIN MOLESWORTH.”

ELIZA.

Is it pofsible that such can be the senti-
ments of the man, who my anxiety and

tendernefs had represented as suffering the most poignant diftrefs, from the struggle between honour and inclination! — Never can I be fufficiently grateful for the efcape I have had from that abyfs of misery into which my difingenuous behaviour had nearly plunged me! may the wretchednefs in which I was on the point of being involved, prove a warning to others, how they engage their affections without the advice or approbation of their friends, efpecially when bleffed with fuch an inef- timable friend, united in fuch a parent.

MRS. MOLESWORTH.

You have fuffered feverely, my dear, for your indiscretion — but what ought to be the anguish of Caroline, whose difsimu- lation and wicked contrivances had nearly destroyed the happinefs of fo many! if her remorse bears any proportion to her guilt, no one needs wifh her punifhment more fevere.

Mrs. VERNON.

I shou'd always be sorry to see such machinations successful, but, independent of the escape my children have had, I am delighted to think that the inheriter of Mr. Vernon's fortune, is such an one as promises to resemble him in his virtues, as well as bear his name.

AMELIA.

William wou'd be much gratified did he know your good opinion of him——cou'd merit secure happiness he wou'd possess a large portion; but he is far from enjoying even repose.

Mrs. MOLESWORTH.

Distress unaccompanied by guilt has many alleviations, and even comforts unknown to the most prosperous state if tinctured with vice; William's is, I trust, not of the latter kind—what are his afflictions?

HARRIET.

Of whatever nature they may be, he will have the sympathy of all his friends; and is entitled to their assistance, if within their power of relief; for never did his benevolent heart withhold it from any one, to whom he had ability to extend it, and where that was denied him, he ever, by his humanity and tenderness, soothed the distress he could not remove.

Mrs. VERNON.

I believe the means of removing his affliction is within your power, and yours only.

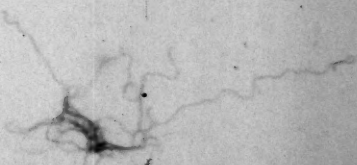
HARRIET.

In mine, Madam!

Mrs. VERNON.

Yes, my dear; for when invited by your aunt to attend your expected marriage

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with his brother, he was under the necessity (as an apology for not coming) to acknowledge the warmth of his attachment to you.

AMELIA.

His letters to me are full of the tenderest concern for your happiness, and fervent prayers that you may meet in Edwin with a man half as sensible of your worth as he is.

HARRIET.

It was impossible to know him, and be insensible to his merit; though situated as I was, I was careful not to admit a more tender sentiment; but must own, had my father's will directed me to regard him in the light in which it placed Edwin, the task would not have been quite so difficult to have reconciled duty to inclination.

Mrs. VERNON.

Your confession, my dear, is consistent with that frankness natural to a mind, of which the characteristic is simplicity and ingenuousness. I congratulate my sister on receiving as a daughter, the niece whom she honours with her esteem and approbation: and may the dispersion of those dark shades that seemed to hang over our prospects, produce in our minds salutary effects, by impressing us with a due sense of the short-sightedness of human wisdom, and an implicit reference to, and reliance on Omnipotence, for the well ordering all events! Let us never seek to avoid contingent calamity by the slightest deviation from the paths of rectitude, for should we, by so doing, escape the threatened evil, the satisfaction would be absorbed in the consciousness of our own demerit — on the other hand, should we fail, and accu-

mulate remorse upon misfortune, the anguish wou'd be aggravated ten-fold. A strict adherence to this rule will be a certain means of deserving if not of ensuring happiness, and will lead us to consider other disappointments like that of this day as fortunate events.



EPILOGUE

TO THE

FORTUNATE DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE scene, to-night, displays what secret smart
Of self-reproach must rend the virgin's heart,
Who rashly dares from monitory eyes
Veil her increasing passions as they rise.
Ah, thanks! — cold! — she has no middle choice
But long repentance, or remorseless vice;
Eliza's tears, or the detested guile
Of artful Caroline's betraying smile; —
Fault leads to fault, till all the soul's defil'd,
And in base woman ends the cunning child.

Hapless Eliza seems a blighted rose,
The while each sister bud in beauty blows,
To the paternal sun their bosoms pour,
And bloom the glory of the summer bower,
Deep in its core the cankering worm receives,
Whose sickly slime cements the yellowing leaves. —

So disingenuousness, with chill controul,
Contracts the worth, the gladness of the soul;
Dims all the rays that light the artless eye,
Pales the soft cheek, and prompts the frequent sigh.

But guilty Caroline we shuddering view,
Like the fell spider, weave her treacherous clue.—
Emblem of hearts, which Envy's venom swells,
That dark, sly, solitary reptile dwells;
Bane to the heedless insects of the meads,
That near the gleaming maze of viscous threads
Wave the light wing;—no more, alas! to bear
Th' entangled victims thro' the sunny air.—
Thus spirits mischievous, that near can prove
The joys of sisterly, and social love,
Stung by their conscious worthlessness, prepare
For others' peace the smooth insidious snare.

O be it ours to watch each thought betimes,
Ere errors grow, by habit, into crimes!
To think the counsel guardian friends impart
Best screens from ill the inexperienced heart;
Cherish each virtuous impulse, and improve
To fairest flowers the seeds of duteous love!—
Those mental flowers shall fear no winter's rage,
Grace our gay prime, and gild our fading age;

If yet to strengthen their precarious stems,
 And in immortal colours dye their gems,
 Enlivening Gratitude, and generous Truth,
 Shine the warm day-star of our rising youth.



DOMESTIC WOE.

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DOMESTIC NO.

DOMESTIC WOE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

LOUISA DENIZEN,

CHARLOTTE DENIZEN,

} Daughters to Mrs. Denizen.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

ELIZA STEVENSON,

MARTHA STEVENSON,

} Nieces to Mrs. Stevenson.

AMELIA JOHNSON,

ARABELLA JOHNSON,

} Wards to Mr. Denizen.

ANN,

MARY,

} Servants to Mrs. Stevenson.

HANNAH, Servant to Mrs. Denizen.

11

Mr. STEVENSON, acknowledged Lover to
AMELIA JOHNSON: to whom he was to
have been married on the same day with
Miss **DENIZEN** to **Mr. BELVILLE**, who
Mr. STEVENSON has just killed in a
Duel as the Play begins.

DOMESTIC WOE.

ACT I.

*Scene draws up and discovers Mrs. Stevenson
and Miss Martha.*

MARTHA.

I WISH Eliza wou'd return from Mr. Denizen's, though there is no probability of her bringing with her comfort, or relief to our anxiety; they and the Johnsons are I dare say outrageous.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I do not know what you can expect to hear: certainty equally excludes hope and

fear; she can have nothing to communicate but a repetition of the distresses in which that worthy family are involved! How changed the present prospect from that, to which a few days ago we all looked forward with delight! Short-sighted mortals! who shall dare to say that the cup of felicity, even when raised to the lip, shall not be dashed to the ground ere tasted, and changed into bitterest woe! The suddenness of the transition, from happiness to misery, gives to the present scene a kind of awful solemnity that nearly overpowers me, and I am sometimes tempted to consider the whole as visionary;—but truth resumes her empire—dispels the courted illusion—and impresses conviction—that the reward of virtue, though sure, is often distant, and not attained with certainty, but in celestial regions!.

MARTHA.

One cou'd almost fancy, you are so agitated, that it was you who had lost a lover instead of Miss Denizen; you seem to reserve no portion of concern for my poor brother, who is I am sure greatly to be pitied.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

To your remark on myself I shall make no reply; but am sorry to hear you speak so lightly on a subject so replete with horror; I do pity my nephew most sincerely—but it is for the cause of his misery—his ungovernable and fiery temper!—the consequence he has most justly incurred!—may it produce such a sincere, lasting, and deep repentance, that his future days may be devoted to atone as far as possible for the errors of his past;—a wish beyond this were idle; he has effectually barred every other avenue to peace: he has mur-

dered the most estimable of men!—that man——

MARTHA. (*Interrupting her.*)

What a harsh expression for wounding an antagonist in a duel! it cou'd not have been more so, had he assassinated him unarmed in a dark entry; it is really dreadful; the Denizens' cou'd not exceed it.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I am sorry, my dear, to shock you by stigmatising so near, and once so dear a relation, by the application of so severe an epithet; though I think it probable that too great delicacy on similar occasions may have tended in some degree to countenance the destructive practice of duelling. By softening the true term murder, into the specious one of an honourable rencontre, we have become familiarised to that, from which but

for this perversion of language, every principled mind wou'd naturally have revolted :—but it wou'd be useless to you, and foreign to my purpose, to enter into a discussion of this fashionable vice, were my abilities equal to it. My sole aim now is (irksome task) to repress in you every attempt to vindicate your brother : the circumstances of the duel were attended with such particular atrocity, that silence respecting it will be least injurious to his fame ; therefore most prudent in his friends.

MARTHA.

I cannot comprehend you ; I never heard a hint of his acting dishonourably—it must be some malicious and false report circulated by the ——

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Forbear to add a name, that you have to my great concern and astonishment,

repeatedly introduced in a manner that reflects disgrace on yourself—you will lead me to imagine that you are desirous of arrogating to yourself the prescriptive privilege of the injurer, never to forgive—if you thus continue to speak so improperly of that respectable family; against whom you can have no better cause of displeasure, than that your brother has irreparably wounded their peace: if they have offended you, it has, I am sure, been unintentionally. The circumstances of which I was about to speak, when you so warmly interrupted me, are fortunately not much known, and were communicated to me in confidence, by your brother's second in that melancholy affair, with the friendly view of silencing, as far as possible, all investigation, not only respecting the duel, in which he seemed to allude to some advantage taken, not quite consistent with the honourable laws of duellists; but particularly to discourage

every enquiry into the grounds of their quarrel.

MARTHA.

My brother told me not an hour before he met Mr. Bellville, that he impertinently wanted to exact a promise from him, previous to his marriage with Miss Johnson, with which he neither cou'd or wou'd comply.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Did I not know what that promise was, I wou'd have engaged for its being consistent with, or rather essential to his true interest and happiness, for never surely was there a more sincere friend, or a more exemplary young man. — Calumny was awed into silence by the brilliancy of his virtues; nor cou'd detraction find where to aim her shafts, except at his concealment and palliation of the faults of that friend,

who has repaid his attachment by depriving him of his life.

MARTHA.

Mr. Bellville's kindness to, and affection for my brother, were always acknowledged with the most lively gratitude; but I know not any man of common spirit, that wou'd have submitted to be dictated to, and even threatened, as he was, by Mr. Bellville.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

It is to his perpetual disgrace, that neither soothing persuasion, or threats, cou'd draw from him a promise, to do what wou'd have been a voluntary act in a man of honour! — But here comes your sister! — Welcome home again, my dear Eliza. I will not distress your tenderness with other enquiries about the valued friends you have left, than how their health has sustained the dreadful shock?

I fear for all : for the bands of love and amity that unite them, are so close and firmly woven, that one pure and exalted spirit seems to animate the whole ; but the delicate state of Amelia Johnson's health for some time past, leads one to apprehend more immediate ill consequences to her.

ELIZA.

She either is, or appears to be, better than usual ; but I strongly suspect and fear, it is assumed, that she may not add to those distresses, which seem to have absorbed all her own. Highly as I ever esteemed that amiable woman, I knew not till now one half her worth.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

It is a just remark, that “ adversity calls
“ forth latent virtues, and prosperity tries

"them." Amelia wou'd, I am sure, stand the test of either.

ELIZA.

Indeed she wou'd: but it is difficult to select a subject for praise in that house; each individual seems so fully to perform every great and every lesser duty of their respective stations — one general object is the pursuit of all — that of soothing the distresses of each other, regardless of their own: never surely were afflictions supported with such true piety, fortitude, and meek resignation; the lovely Louisa Denizen appears more than mortal!

MARTHA.

But you must have been very uncomfortable, from perpetually hearing severe things said against my brother, which must be very mortifying.

ELIZA.

One wou'd really suppose, my dear Martha, you were totally unacquainted with that family, or you never cou'd suspect them of voluntarily inflicting a moment's pain on an unoffending friend; I had not one uncomfortable sensation from that cause, except what arose from a consciousness of my connection with the misguided author of their distress — even that they strove to banish with an address and delicacy peculiar to themselves: they are strangers to hatred, vengeance, and every baleful passion; — there was therefore no danger that they shou'd express them; he is never spoken of under any harsher epithet, than the unhappy, the deluded, or the rash young man! nor do I think he wou'd be named at all, were it not by the lovely, the heroic Louisa, who sometimes mentions him to Amelia, whose

partiality for him, she imagines, is not quite extinct.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Is it possible she can assume composure enough to converse about the man, who has blasted all her hopes!

ELIZA.

There is nothing too great, too magnanimous for her; she not only talks of him, but insists that Amelia shall not form any resolution against him, till she knows the whole affair: and has more than once hinted, if she finds, (when her mind is able to bear an enquiry into the subject of his quarrel with Mr. Bellville,) that his conduct does not exclude hope of his being in some degree worthy, she shall be an importunate advocate for him; mildly adding, "All my views of comfort on this side the grave, now center in the

“happiness of my friends;” and my beloved Amelia’s could never have been indifferent to me!

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Dear patient mourner! O that my nephew could hear her generous, her noble pleading for the author of all her woes! if that failed to produce a reformation, hopeless indeed must be his case! My Martha too, (*turning to her,*) feels, I am sure, much compunction, for her unjust suspicions, both of this lovely sufferer, and the amiable Louisa.

MARTHA.

I wish I had said less about them, but it was natural they should be violent, and therefore——

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ELIZA.

I am sorry you think so, my dear sister, because it might lead one to fear you wou'd act less nobly; but I do not believe that such are your own sentiments.

MARTHA.

Whose then shou'd they be? I suppose to poor Ann, as usual, the fault is to be imputed, (if any fault it is;) I am sure, she suffers daily from unjust suspicions! But how does Amelia bear the name of my brother? her looks do not absolutely exclude all hopes?

ELIZA.

I cannot describe them; there is an indignant steadiness in her countenance so new and unnatural to her, that without absolutely changing her features, impresses a kind of horror whilst one beholds it; and her mind is, I am persuaded, at such

times, labouring with some passion, the conflicts of which are exquisitely painful.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Poor afflicted young woman! many are her griefs, and I fear they will be yet more severe!

ELIZA. (*With agitation.*)

You alarm me greatly, my dear aunt; surely there is no new affliction in store for her; tell me, I entreat you.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

You terrify yourself unnecessarily; there is nothing new, I assure you; but the conversing so long on this melancholy topic, has so renewed every painful feeling, that some relief will be salutary to us all: we shall have time for a walk before supper, and the serenity of this

mild evening will contribute to calm and
sooth our harrahsed spirits.

ELIZA.

We will attend you with pleasure.

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE A PARLOUR.

*Mary putting the breakfast things. Enter
Ann, speaking as she comes in.*

IF breakfast is so near ready, I must
go and waken Miss Martha.

MARY.

So you had better, for my mistress has
been up a great while, and she is not pleas'd
if the young ladies are not ready.

ANN.

Why, then, she may be angry, for what
I care.

MARY.

I am sure you always make such a fuss with Miss Martha, that one shou'd suppose you cou'd not bear to hear a cross word spoken to her.

ANN.

'Tis no business of yours —— I can't make more fuss with her, than you do about the others.

MARY.

I shall always speak well of them, for I never served a better mistress, or a sweeter young lady. Miss Stevenson is for all the world like Miss Denizen, so affable to every one —— so pitiful to old and sick folks.

ANN.

So they are alike, I declare! And I'll tell you what else they are like —— why,

an oyster that has been kept in water without salt ; when opened it looks mighty nice and tempting —— but when down it is so —— maw —— kish! , that it goes near to make one sick —— yet it is so mild, it merely keeps reproaching you for hours together with its insipidity, just as Miss Stevenson does —— a good passionate Miss is worth a dozen such ! for they are sure to make one amends afterwards, either by letting one shew spirit in turn, or by a little crossing of the hand —— bribery is all fair in these days.

MARY.

Truth will out, as my mistress often says —— I have now got a reason why you love Miss Martha, so much better than Miss Stevenson.

ANN.

And reason enough, but it is not the only one. Miss Stevenson shews in every thing her dislike of me; if I am in the room she will sooner fetch a thing herself, than ask me to do it; her whole manner shews she can't abide me, and I am sure I cannot guess for what.

MARY,

Ah, Ann, you are not so ignorant as you pretend to be; you know it is because Miss Martha is too fond of you —— and so she is sure enough.

ANN.

That's a fine reason, truly; —— she may be ashamed to hate a poor servant only because her sister is good to me: I am even with her, however, for I hate her as bad —— aye, as bad as I hate those Denizens, who turned me away, and, not

content with that, did all in their power to set Miss Martha against me. — I have not forgot it, and, what is more, I'll be revenged if ever I have the power.

MARY.

For shame, you only hate them because they saw through you, — I am sure it is not to Miss Martha's credit, that she set herself against all advice, and was always so sulky when my mistress said she wou'd not hire you, that she wou'd not speak the day through: — and now she makes more ado with you, than she does with either her aunt or sister. There is such a whispering — (*bell rings*) — that is my mistresses's bell, I must run and see what she wants.

[Exit Mary.]

ANN. (*Looking after her.*)

Nor will it be in the power of any one to prevent our whispering, I can tell you — we have many important matters to settle — Miss is undone to tell her secrets — I stand all astonishment, (just as our Deborah did t'other night, when she saw the conjurer eating fire,) till I have got out of her not only her own secrets, but those of all her family; this gives me firm hold of her; I can do just what I please with her, for when once a young lady makes a confidante of her servant, by communicating what ought not to be revealed, she ceases to be mistress either of herself or servant. I have now a pretty profitable place, and I shall contrive to double it, if I can but preserve my influence; and when there is nothing more to be got, it is the easiest thing in the world to pick a quarrel. — But here she comes; I must change my tone;

(going to her;) why did you not ring, that I might have come and help you dress, Miss Martha?

MARTHA.

Because I thought my aunt wou'd hear the bell, and she makes such a noise if we do not wait on ourselves; besides, my sister dressed in my room, and she wou'd have preached for an hour if I had.

ANN.

I am sorry she is come home again, for she keeps you sadly under somehow, and say you are but a year younger; it is only because she knows you have more beauty and wit; and she is afraid, the gentlemen (who all like lively young ladies) shou'd prefer you to her. It often grieves me too, to see how partial my mistress is to, her; — for her I might do as much as I like; she only forbid

my waiting of you; — but that shall never prevent me, for I wou'd serve my dear Miss Martha, at the hour of midnight. To be sure, I do get sadly used by my fellow servants an account of my great love for you; and I often fear I shall lose my place by it; the worst of which wou'd be the loss of my young mistress.

MARTHA.

Thank you for your love, Ann, and be assured, shou'd I ever keep a maid of my own, I shou'd prefer you to all the servants in the world; and though I have not the power of rewarding you as I cou'd wish, accept this guinea to buy you a gown: and do whilst we are at breakfast, slip out with a bundle of fine linen you will find in my room, to Mrs. Harris's, get her to make the new, and mend the old, and tell her you will call and get

them back privately, for it is amongst my aunt's sins for young people to wear what they do not make ; but here she comes. *Ann runs to the table and pretends to be setting the things, then goes out.*

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I thought your sister had been here?

Enter Eliza.

I was just asking after you ; make the breakfast, if you please.

ELIZA.

Making the Tea.

I fear it is only a compliment, to say I hope you have rested well, if one may judge by your countenance?

Mrs. STEVENSON.

My mind was too painfully occupied for sleep ; in contrasting the present

mournful scene, with that which delusive hope had falsely painted. This she led us to anticipate as the day that was to render the lovely Louisa, and the incomparable Bellville, the mutual rewarder of each others virtues : — This too the æra from which the siren bid us date the accomplishment of all our wishes for my nephew, from his union with the gentle, the amiable Amelia Johnson. — Cruel deceiver ! those excellent young women are now mourning — the one, the loss of all she thought great and good ; the other — that her own happiness, and that of her friend, has been inhumanly sacrificed by the man, to whom she was on the point of being connected for life : and whose crime in destroying the generous Bellville, is by no means his greatest guilt.

ELIZA.

Surely, my dearest madam, you do not exercise your wonted moderation and candour, in judging my unhappy, my exiled brother! (*she bursts into tears, and puts her handkerchief to her eyes.*) The fatal duel is the heaviest charge alledged against him — the consequences of which will fall so severely on himself, from the poignant anguish he must ever feel, as well as for the loss (for such I fear it must eventually prove) of his beloved Amelia — his punishment will not need the aggravation of unkind censure from his friends to embitter his remaining days.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I wish, my dear girl, it were possible at once to discharge my duty, and be silent over the faults of your brother; but you have confirmed me in the opinion that it is not, by expressing your fears, that

Amelia is now lost to him ; this implies a doubt about that, against which there is an insurmountable bar.

ELIZA.

With agitation and grief.

I fear there is more amiss in his conduct than I am acquainted with ; condescend, I entreat you, my dear aunt, to inform me of it. However severe the anguish excited by the knowledge that William is still less worthy of my affection, your tenderness will administer the balm of consolation, and inspire me with fortitude to sustain the shock.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

It grieves me, my dear, to distress your amiable sensibility, by imposing a painful duty ; by telling you, you must discourage, in Amelia, every prepossession in favour of your brother, shou'd you find

her inclined to pardon and forget his crime.

ELIZA.

I fear he must not now ever aspire beyond that; but shou'd Louisa's influence be likely to prevail; — does honour forbid my strengthening it?

Mrs. STEVENSON.

It does more, it enjoins you to weaken, to oppose it; — as you will acknowledge when you know the grounds of the quarrel. A few days previous to that unfortunate affair, Mr. Bellville received an anonymous letter, of which I am now in possession, he having enclosed it to your brother, in one that will perpetuate his integrity, and the sincerity of his friendship: they were both left in his pocket on changing his clothes before his departure from England, and given me by the friend I before spoke of.

MARTHA.

I dare say the report was utterly false.

ELIZA. (*With a sigh.*)

Alas, I fear not, my sister; innocence need not wade through blood for a justification! the privilege of being vindictive is more generally assumed by the aggressor.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

This is the letter. (*Reads.*)

“ Sir,

“ Induced by motives of esteem
“ for Miss Johnson, with whom I have
“ some acquaintance, and knowing you
“ to be a man of the strictest honour, I
“ wish to save you the future regret of
“ having been instrumental in promoting
“ an union between that lady and Mr.

“ Stevenson; by advising you to make
“ an immediate enquiry into his conduct
“ and circumstances, in both of which
“ you are greatly deceived. He has for
“ some time had a connection with a
“ woman whose extravagance is as un-
“ bounded as her influence over him; she
“ has involved him in difficulties that
“ were inextricable, in consequence of
“ which he had recourse a few nights
“ since to the dice, by which he com-
“ pleted his ruin, and returned to the
“ author of his accumulated distress, in a
“ state little short of distraction. She
“ (fiend like) suggested the expedient of
“ strict secrecy, till in possession of the
“ lady's fortune, which was to repair all
“ losses; to this proposal he has infam-
“ ously assented. If you have doubts
“ respecting the truth of these charges,
“ you will probably gain some informa-
“ tion from your friend Mr. Bridges, who

“ was present the night of his losses, and
 “ repeatedly but ineffectually remonstrated
 “ on the consequences.

“ I am, Sir, &c.”

ELIZA.

(With a dejected air.)

Surely these heavy charges cou'd not
 all be true?

Mrs. STEVENSON.

They were but too well founded. Mr. Bellville made the proper enquiry, and found to his inexpressible surprise and grief, that the whole was strictly true: he immediately enclosed this letter to your brother; told him the contents had since been confirmed, and, after remonstrating on the enormity of his conduct, adds, “ it is still in your power to pre-
 “ serve my friendship, and the esteem

“ of your Amelia, by a solemn renun-
“ ciation of this improper connection!
“ With the lady I will undertake to settle
“ the matter, and will make a proper
“ provision for her. With respect to
“ your pecuniary losses, let me entreat
“ you to forswear gaming; and to make
“ an ingenuous avowal of the present
“ deranged state of your finances: such
“ an honourable proceeding will, I am
“ sure, rather strengthen, than weaken
“ Miss Johnson's attachment; and as
“ her fortune is so large, she will think
“ a part of it well expended in extricat-
“ ing you out of your difficulties. Hav-
“ ing no doubt of my dear Stevenson's
“ acquiescence, it is unnecessary to pro-
“ vide against non-compliance. Though
“ he may, in an unguarded moment, be
“ seduced to swerve, his natural bias will,
“ I am convinced, soon recall him to the

“ practice of whatever is laudable — of
“ whatever is honourable.

“ I am, &c.

“ BELLVILLE.”

ELIZA.

I am sure such a letter cou'd excite no other sentiments than those of love, esteem, and gratitude.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Such wou'd have been its effects, had his crime originated in a rash despair: the guard of a virtuous heart wou'd not long have deserted its post, it wou'd have quickly resumed its station, and been doubly vigilant to defend it in future against every attack; the exhortations of his friends wou'd have been received with thankfulness and laudable exultation from having anticipated them by contrition, and reparation; instead of which, his concern arose

from detection, as was too clearly proved by his angry answer. — “ That he
“ declined his negotiation with the lady,
“ as he had no intention of giving her
“ up : that with respect to his affairs, he
“ had no fears but that he shou’d in a
“ short time retrieve them, and desired
“ not the interference of either real or
“ pretended friends.” What passed further remains unknown, except that a challenge was sent shortly after by your brother.

ELIZA.

Unhappy deluded William ! With what anguish will it rend my heart to become the opposer of your happiness ! The incomparable Amelia might, perhaps, in time, been prevailed upon to pardon your rashness, but your determined, your avowed adherence to vice, excludes every ray of hope — and cruel necessity ! — will

impel a sister, to whom your interest has ever been dear as her own, to plead against you, shou'd the gentleness of her friend incline her to forgive you. O my honoured Madam, my second parent, guide; sustain me; whilst sisterly affection glows warm within my breast, to sacrifice that and every other consideration, to the conscientious discharge of my duty.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

The purity of your intentions, and solicitude to do right, will procure for you, far more powerful aid, than that of a weak mortal; if ever the painful effort becomes a duty.

Enter Servant.

Miss Charlotte Denizen, and Miss Arabella Johnson, are here.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

What can have brought them at so early an hour?

ELIZA.

If you will take the breakfast things out, Mary, I will go and invite them in.

[Exit Eliza and Mary.]

MARTHA.

I wonder they shou'd choose this day for coming out ; besides I thought in point of etiquette we shou'd have waited on them first.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

No one can be better acquainted with the rules of good-breeding, nor were they ever known to violate any ; but they do not sacrifice the gratification of their friends to mere punctilio : there is a peculiar delicacy in their waving ceremony and coming here first.

F

Enter the Ladies. Mrs. Stevenson goes up to them, takes their hands, and says,
I am glad to see you, my dears.

CHARLOTTE.

Our visit will give you more pain than pleasure, when you know we are come in search of our dear Amelia, and the hopes that soothed us during our walk, has been at once extinguished by an assurance from Miss Stevenson, that you have not seen or heard any thing of her.

Mrs. STEVENSON. (*Incoherently.*)

I can scarce credit my senses: has she left you? At what time? And where did she say she was going?

ARABELLA.

We can neither conjecture where she is, or her motive for leaving her friends.

ELIZA.

When did you first miss her?

ARABELLA.

Her maid, as usual, went into her room at seven o'clock this morning, found the bed as she had left it, her mistress not there, and a letter on the table addressed to Miss Denizen.

MARTHA.

And does not that inform you?

CHARLOTTE.

No, the letter rather encreases our perplexity, it is so misteriously worded; my father (whether by way of comforting my mother, or that he really thought so) suggested it as probable that she might be here, this was caught at eagerly by us all, but particularly by Louisa, who seems nearly

sinking under this aggravation of her griefs.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

This is a most unexpected, and unhappy circumstance indeed: have you no recollection of any conversation that may at all give a clue to the cause of withdrawing herself from her guardian's house and protection.

ARABELLA.

Not any. In two or three days after that melancholly affair, she began to resume her usual serenity, and appeared when below, nearly as chearful as ever, but when I have been with her alone, she wou'd more have resembled a statue, had not her silence been interrupted by the deepest sighs: one morning I complained of it, upon which she burst into an agony of tears, said she had nothing to converse about, that cou'd

possibly give me pleasure, that she never retired till unable longer to support her spirits, and as soon as they were relieved by tears, and the traces of them worn off, she returned to those friends to whom she owed so much.

CHARLOTTE.

I now remember, though I did not notice it at the time, that she seemed unusually agitated when we separated last night; and I also recollect that yesterday, when my sister was cautioning her against any hasty or fixed resolutions respecting Mr. Stevenson, she turned round, more discomposed than usual, and said, "I shall be of age to-morrow, to release Mr. Denizen from his troublesome charge, and to determine decidedly for myself; let me conjure you, my dear Louisa, to renew the subject no more till to-morrow be past."

MARTHA.

I have not a doubt but my brother has prevailed with her to marry him.

ELIZA.

I wonder Martha you will talk so idly, what shou'd prevent her avowing her intentions, if such they were? Miss Denizen has given sufficient proofs how nobly she thinks and acts on this occasion: has she not been throughout his best, his only advocate? when none of his relations cou'd with the smallest propriety plead for him.

CHARLOTTE.

There is no knowing what to think: I never can suffer myself to suspect, that Amelia wou'd take so imprudent a step; or an expression in her letter might create a doubt.

ARABELLA.

I declare I see nothing so wrong in it: I know if my guardian, Mrs. Denizen, and Louisa, (who is the principal person to be affected by it,) all consented, I shou'd see no such great imprudence in it.

ELIZA.

You are persuading yourself to see it in that light from an idea that your sister may have acted so, and in that you are right; but I cannot conceive such wou'd be your unbia'sed sentiments, and still less, that Louisa can ever have been persuaded into, or voluntarily taken such a step, which wou'd unjustly imply a restraint that never existed.

CHARLOTTE.

I am quite of Eliza's opinion, that whenever this mysterious affair comes to be cleared up, Amelia's conduct will be found what

it ever has been ; strictly irreproachable, though at present inexplicable. But we must hasten home if you please, Arabella, where all will be impatient for our return, though, alas, we can convey little comfort. My father and mother seem almost as much depressed as Louisa.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I will not attempt to detain you, for the longer their hopes are suffered to exist, the more severe will be their disappointment ; my kindest regards to them :—that I sympathize with them most sincerely they will not doubt, or that it would afford me the highest satisfaction could I be instrumental in the slightest degree to the restoration of their peace : my endeavours will be unre-mitted to gain information of Miss Johnson, in which should I succeed you may depend on being instantly apprised of it, and am

sure you will have the goodness, should you be successful, to relieve our minds by the intelligence.

CHARLOTTE.

You may depend upon it ; — but as the morning is fine, can you not accompany us ? You know what pleasure your company always gives at the Grove ; and though it is at present a melancholy scene, you are not amongst the number of those who choose to partake only of the prosperity of your friends.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I hope I shall never make one of that despicable class : but such conduct would in me be stamped with peculiar baseness, who am so immediately connected with the wretched author of such unmerited distress.

CHARLOTTE.

Forbear, my dear Madam, to recur to that topic, you know it is positively interdicted; and agreed to by all parties, that no reference must ever be made to it: though it cannot be obliterated, the most severe cannot extend it beyond the offender. — But come, pray give us your company.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I wou'd with pleasure, were we not engaged out to dinner; to-morrow we will wait upon you, (*looking at her watch,*) but there is time before we dress, for going part of the way with you; we will take our shawls as we go through the hall.

MARTHA.

I must wish you a good morning, for I have something to do before I go to dress.

CHARLOTTE and ARABELLA.

I am sorry for it.

[*Exeunt.*]

MARTHA.

My aunt's being out will afford a nice opportunity for getting Ann to do my hair, and assist me to dress.

(She goes to ring the bell, Ann enters at the same time, and says as she comes in,)

O Miss Martha, I thought they would never have gone! I have been dying with impatience to tell you, that Miss Johnson has eloped.

MARTHA.

They came to enquire for her here, so that I know she has left Mr. Denizen's, but can you tell me where she is?

ANN.

I cannot be quite sure, but I suspect my young Master could give some intelligence of her ; so I flatly told a very particular acquaintance, (Mr. Denizen's own man, who they say is a lover of mine, Ma'm,) that they were together ; and it put him in such a bustle ! for he said his master would give all the world to know, and he shou'd be sure of a handsome present, and that will do somewhat towards beginning house-keeping you know, Miss.

MARTHA.

That he is your lover then is something more than report, Ann : but have you any reasons for supposing Amelia is with my brother ?

ANN.

Indeed I have very strong ones, so I thought there cou'd be no harm, in saying

to Mr. Thomas that it was positively so; and he galloped off as hard as he cou'd to tell his master.

MARTHA.

I am delighted to think how my brother will triumph over them all; I am glad too, because it will plague the Denizens, who hardly take any notice of me, or shew me the least civility: my sister will be finely vexed to think I was in the secret, for I got such a set down for only saying when they were talking of it this morning, that I had no doubt they either were together, or wou'd be soon.

ANN.

That was the luckiest stroke in the world, for I actually told Thomas you had a private letter that let you into the whole secret, but that you wou'd not have it known upon any account.

MARTHA.

O, Ann, you shou'd not have done so, suppose Mr. Denizen shou'd ask me, or name it to my aunt?

ANN.

There is no danger of that, but if he shou'd, you need not give him a positive answer; sure you are old enough to receive letters without being obliged to publish what is in them; it is treating you just like a child.

MARTHA.

That is very true; but if my aunt shou'd insist upon seeing it?

ANN.

Say you burnt it directly.

Enter Mary.

Mr. Denizen's man wants to speak with you, Ann.

[Exeunt Mary and Ann.]

MARTHA.

I would lay any wager he is come to enquire further into this tale Ann has told him ; she will bring me into some difficulties, I must forbid her proceeding with it.

Enter Ann with a Note.

ANN.

I was bid to deliver this to you privately, so you see there is no danger of Mr. Denizen's getting you into any scrape.

MARTHA.

Opens the Note and reads it aloud.

" Madam,

" The information I have this morning
" received, that you are privy to the depar-

“ ture of my ward, and that your brother
“ met her to conduct her into France,
“ gives me the most extreme uneasiness,
“ though I know not how to credit an
“ asserstion so derogatory to the honour of
“ Miss Johnson, unless confirmed by your
“ pen; let me therefore entreat you will
“ oblige me with all the particulars respect-
“ ing this transaction, and you may depend
“ upon it, it shall never transpire from me
“ to any of your friends, how I came by
“ the intelligence, as I find you wish it to
“ be a secret; but I shou’d be undeserving
“ the confidence I solicit, did I omit to
“ point out from the present instance, how
“ dangerous it is to trust a servant with
“ what you cou’d like to remain unknown,
“ for I do not scruple telling you that my
“ information comes through your favourite
“ Ann,” (*Ann aside.*) [I’ll be hanged if I
die in your debt for that.] “ and leave

“ you at full liberty to make what use you
“ please of this discovery.

“ I am, &c.

“ G. DENIZEN.”

MARTHA.

Into what a situation have you brought me! What is to be done? I neither can or will pretend to know any thing about the matter ; so give me the pen and ink.

ANN.

Brings and holds it, pretending to cry.

I little thought, my dear Miss Martha, that you wou'd repay me for all my love, in this way: never in my life cou'd I refuse you any thing, and many a scolding you know I have had on your account; well, I cannot help it, shou'd my mistress part with me, (which you know she wou'd be glad to find an excuse to do) I am sadly afraid you will not find any other so ready to do every thing for you as I have been.

MARTHA.

But my aunt wou'd never forgive me, shou'd she find me out.

ANN.

But Miss, you see the only means to prevent her is to make Mr. Denizen your friend; he has promised not to name it if you tell him, and you will not be able to persuade him but what you know all about it; if you deny it, the whole affair is sure to come out.

MARTHA.

I wou'd do any thing to oblige you, Ann, but what can I say?

ANN.

O my dear young lady, you know better than such a poor ignorant creature as I can pretend to tell you; only answer

it equivocatically; and that will be sure to make him think you know more than you do. (*Martha takes the pen and ink, writes, and then reads aloud.*)

" SIR,

" When I promised to keep the
" affair a secret, I determined not to com-
" municate it to any one, much less to
" Miss Johnson's guardian, I must there-
" fore decline being very explicit; but
" in consequence of your assurance (which
" I regard as sacred) not to betray me
" to my family, I will venture to tell
" you, that if a fair wind and other cir-
" cumstances concurred, Amelia will most
" probably be met with in France.

" I am, Sir."

MARTHA.

You see how desirous I am to oblige you. I have followed your advice and

written evasively : I have not said she is there positively, though I do believe one might, for where else shou'd she be ?

ANN.

Nobody sure cou'd have managed it better, it is delightful to think what a flurry it will put them all in. Shall I take it down ?

MARTHA.

I am going by that way, and will give it Mary, that you may put these things away, and then you can meet me in my room, and do my hair before they come back, though I fear there will be hardly time.

[Exit Martha.]

ANN.

Parsons may preach against idleness as long as they please ; that like every thing else has its enemies, but I see more good

than harm in it, for my part ; for I much doubt whether I shou'd have carried my point in such a hurry if —— this hair had not wanted doing, and (*with an air of affected consequence*) I have been so exceedingly kind, and indulgent, in doing every thing for her —— that I firmly believe the poor child cou'd as soon make, or mend her own clothes, as put them on without my assistance. My mistress sometimes tells the ladies, (*mimicking her,*) “ Virtue, my “ dear children, is its own reward,” —— and I begin to think the venerable old maid is in the right —— for when I first did all those good offices privately for my sweet Miss Martha, I had no other view, I do declare, than serving — myself, by pocketing a little cash —— I little foresaw then I shou'd have the happiness of revenging upon those hateful Denizens their ill usage : they will now find, what all their wisdom and goodness (that one

is so surfeited with hearing about) never taught them — that a discarded servant seldom wants ability, more than inclination, to repay the disgrace. (*A bell rings.*) Miss is in a hurry — so am not I — I shall teach her many useful lessons, besides that of patience, before I have done with her — amongst others, that if she would be punctually obeyed, to let her conduct, rather than her words, command respect: but I must not proceed too hastily with my instructions — lest another letter should arrive from these Denizens.

[*Exit.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE A PARLOUR.

Mr. Denizen's House.

*Mrs. Denizen and Miss Charlotte at work,
Arabella Johnson reading to them Johnson's
Rasselas, page 208.*

“ TO hear complaints is wearisome
“ alike to the wretched and the happy;
“ for who wou'd cloud by adventitious
“ grief, the short gleams of gaiety, which
“ life allows us? or who that is struggling
“ under his own evils, will add to them
“ the miseries of another?” (*pausing and
partly shutting the book.*) This appears a

strange assercion ; it is I think natural and justifiable to complain when grieved or oppressed, and it must, I am sure, be a very unfeeling being who wou'd not patiently listen to one's distresses ; do you not think so, Mrs. Denizen ?

CHARLOTTE.

I have in general observed that those who preface their enquiry about the opinion of others, with assering their own, rather seek to make converts to their own system, than to gain information. Is not that your case, Arabella ?

ARABELLA.

According to the statement you have just drawn, I was not likely to be in pursuit of your sentiments, which do not always, as you know, accord with mine ; my enquiry was addressd to Mrs. Denizen, if she wou'd have favour'd me with an answer.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Starting as from a reverie.

I am sorry I did not hear you, but my mind is so tortured between suspense on the one hand, and a dreaded direful certainty on the other, that my attention imperceptibly wanders from present to distant objects; this, though the best apology I can offer, is hardly admissable, for those sufferings which are not the consequence of guilt, shou'd be supported with a firmness that wou'd leave the mind sufficiently disengaged to attend to the duties of our respective stations, and to the comfort of surrounding friends. But, alas! to be right in theory, and wrong in practice, is, I fear, by no means singular, or new with me.

CHARLOTTE.

Surely, my dear Madam, no one can have less cause for self-accusation on this

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account than yourself; tenderly as you interest yourself in the concerns of every one, and keenly as you feel the present distresses of those so dear to you, it is not possible but your mind must be too busily, and too painfully occupied to attend to indifferent topics.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Indeed this last stroke seems to have sunk deeper than all the preceding ones.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

Mrs. Stevenson and the young ladies are here.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Shew them in.

Enter Ladies.

Mrs. STEVENSON and NIECES.

Good morning to you, my dear Madam,
I hope Mr. and Miss Denizen are well?

Mrs. DENIZEN.

They are pretty well, I thank you.
Charlotte, do let your sister know our
friends are here.

[Exit Charlotte.]

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Do not let me hasten her coming down,
if you think it will distress her.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

There is no one to whom she would
so soon come; and to break the chain of
her reflections at present will be of use to
her. You cannot, my dear Mrs. Stevenson,
conceive with what noble firmness the
sweet girl has borne up, till this last dread-

ful trial: — this indeed seems to have nearly overpowered us all, and confirms me in the opinion that inevitable evils are best supported. Suspence opens a door to hope, which diverts the mind from its strength of resolution; but certainty closes it, and shuts out the deceitful betrayer; we then patiently acquiesce, and seek for better sources of consolation.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

The mind of Miss Denizen is equal to every great and noble effort; but this last affair was as you observed, so unexpected, that there was no being prepared for it, and so inexplicable, that it seems to mock every attempt to account for it. You have not yet heard of Miss Johnson, I conclude?

Enter Miss Denizen; she goes up to Mrs. Stevenson and the young ladies, and after paying her compliments to each, and passing her handkerchief across her eyes, says,

I fear you cannot revive us with any tidings of my beloved Amelia?

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I was just making the same enquiry as you entered.

Miss DENIZEN.

They have told you, I suppose, that my dear father set off yesterday at two o'clock for France, on the fruitless errand of finding her there.

Mrs. STEVENSON. (*With surprise.*)

No, I never heard a word of it; is it possible she can be gone thither!

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Mr. Denizen has received intelligence that she is, seemingly well authenticated — and having nothing to oppose to it, but my own, and Louisa's opinion, (with which indeed his own strongly coincided,) of the impossibility of her ever being induced to it, there was no persuading him against the attempt to overtake, and prevail with her to accompany him back, and at the same time to settle it with Mr. Stevenson to come over at any period she may appoint; and thus avoid the impropriety that wou'd attend their marrying abroad.

Miss DENIZEN.

This is the plan laid down, but nothing short of my father's seeing her, and hearing from her own mouth that she had formed such a resolution, will ever convince me she is capable of it.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Heaven forbid that it shou'd be true!
O that I had but known time enough to
have accompanied Mr. Denizen! had she
been even at the altar, I wou'd have com-
pelled her to listen to me.

Miss DENIZEN.

Your looks speak even more than your
words, strong as they are: do, my dear
Mrs. Stevenson, explain the cause of your
emotion.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Believe me, my dear young lady, I wou'd
not hesitate were I at liberty. Can nothing
be gathered from Miss Johnson's letter?

Mrs. DENIZEN.

You shall judge. (*She reads it loud.*)
“ When this comes to my beloved Louisa's
“ hand, I shall have withdrawn myself
“ from all that my heart holds dear —

“ to the anguish it gives me thus to tear
“ myself from you, and the other revered
“ inhabitants of this house, may you ever
“ be a stranger! — it cannot be expressed
“ — the necessity for it must not, fur-
“ ther, than that it appears to me the
“ only expedient left, to spare you the
“ agony of opening afresh those wounds
“ which have scarcely ceased to bleed.
“ Afsure your dear father and mother,
“ that my heart glows with the most ardent
“ gratitude for all their parental goodness
“ to me: to your dear self I can only
“ say, that had I loved you less, or been
“ more insensible of the noble, the exalted
“ sacrifice you have made of your own
“ feelings to procure my happiness, the
“ step I am about to take had been un-
“ necessary. Adieu, best, and most ten-
“ derly beloved of friends, cease not to love
“ your unhappy, but ever affectionate

“ AMELIA JOHNSON.”

“ P. S. My sister will, I hope, do every
“ thing in her power to preserve your
“ love: the tender heart of my little pupil,
“ Charlotte, (as I used to call her,) will
“ want no incitement to affectionate atten-
“ tions, she is in the constant practice of
“ them.”

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Can you form any conclusions from
this?

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I dare not go so far as that, but own I
shou'd greatly fear that she has been over
persuaded by my nephew.

CHARLOTTE.

Then why leave us? My sister was, you
know, always pleading in his favour.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

From motives of mistaken delicacy she might wish to save you all the awkwardness of so disagreeable a visitor.

Miss DENIZEN.

That her motives were good we may safely venture to affirm, nor has her judgment ever appeared defective; it would be therefore extraordinary if she should suppose, it would affect me less to see him in the character of her husband than her lover.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

There is no end to conjecture, a day or two at farthest will, I hope, relieve us from this painful suspense.

CHARLOTTE.

A carriage has just stopped at the door.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

It does not signify, my dear, William you know has had orders to prevent the admittance of visitors: none but such as are impelled by impertinent or idle curiosity wou'd offer to intrude just now, and such deserve a repulse.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

A lady begs to speak with you for one minute.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Where is William? I forbid the entrance of any one.

SERVANT.

He is just stepped into the grounds; he left your orders, but——

Mrs. DENIZEN.

But what? Who is it? Do you not know the person?

SERVANT. (*Confused.*)

Pray, Madam, do not command me to say, because the lady said she was sure I had better not tell you.

Miss DENIZEN.

My father is not returned?

SERVANT.

No indeed, Miss.

[*Exit hastily.*]

Mrs. DENIZEN.

I will go, for it may be some one in distress, unused to solicit assistance; if I find it so, I shall call upon you for your contributions.

[*Exit Mrs. Denizen.*]

ALL.

We are ready to answer your demands.

Miss DENIZEN.

Surely it cannot be our dear Amelia!

Mrs. STEVENSON.

I began to have my doubts, from Hannah's seeming to know her, yet declining to tell; till I found Mr. Denizen was not with her.

Miss DENIZEN.

It is some mysterious business, I wish my mother wou'd come back.

CHARLOTTE.

And when she does, she is so selfish of her griefs, that if it is any thing that distresses her, she will if possible hoard it all.

ARABELLA.

You are as industrious to create alarm as a group of children assembled together at night, each contributing their mite to the general stock of terror.

MARTHA.

You cannot wonder that apprehension should predominate in the present state of things.

Enter Mrs. Denizen.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

May we ask who it was that wanted you?

Mrs. DENIZEN.

It was one who will be most cordially welcomed by us all.

Miss DENIZEN.

O, it is my beloved Amelia! is it not?—
No, that cannot be, my father wou'd have

accompanied her if they met? Speak, my dear Madam, is it your other child—where is she? Is she come? Is she married?

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Compose yourself, my dear child, or you will incur the very danger she was so tenderly solicitous to guard you from, that of too great alarm: she is returned unmarried, after meeting with your father accidentally—rather let me say providentially, when he having business of consequence on the same route, proceeded at her request, and entrusted her to the care of faithful Thomas.

MARTHA.

(Faints on the shoulder of her sister, all run towards her with smelling bottles, &c. when she recovers, she looks wildly about, and says,)

Where is he? Where is Mr. Denizen?
O I have been his murderer!

(All look at each other in terror and surprise.)

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Her head is quite unsettled by this sudden faintness.

MARTHA. *(In an agony.)*

I wou'd it were! O Mrs. Denizen, conceal not the dreadful errand on which he is gone; I deserve to endure the severest tortures—but his wife and children!—O support me, heaven!

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Indeed, my dear, he is perfectly safe and well.

MARTHA.

You know not how short a time it may be permitted you to say so, do let me go to Miss Johnson, and learn from her.

Miss DENIZEN.

No, let me be the first to rush into her arms, and welcome her return, and I will bring her to you.

ARABELLA.

I will go with you.

[*Exeunt.*]

Mrs. DENIZEN. (*Aside.*)

Had she not better be put to bed? She is certainly delirious.

MARTHA.

(*With Hands and Eyes uplifted.*)

Spare me, gracious Heaven, this insupportable weight of misery! and the whole of my future life shall evince my gratitude for the signal mercy! Where is Amelia? Do, Eliza, lead me to her.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

She will be here instantly : do, Charlotte, give me the bottle, and step and hasten them in.

Enter the Ladies.

Miss Johnson curtsies to Mrs. and Miss Stevensons, and going up to Martha, and taking her by the hand, says,

Compose yourself, my dear Miss Martha, Mr. Denizen is not only safe at present, but there is no future danger to himself or your brother, I give you my word. The cause of your alarm is divulged only to me, and with me shou'd have rested, had not your apprehensions betrayed it; that they have done so, confirms the hope I had cherished, that the indiscretion of which you have been guilty, was unpremeditated, and that you foresaw not the dreadful consequences which might ensue.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Every thing seems envelop'd in mystery! That you are returned, my dear Miss Johnson, is a source of heartfelt satisfaction: may I ask whether you have been far? and what this indiscretion of my niece's is, to which you allude?

AMELIA.

Knowing you have heard I was gone to France; I will assure you it is the last place in the world to which I cou'd have been persuaded to go. With respect to your other enquiry, I am not at liberty to answer it, nor am I inclined, assured that my young friend's compunction, will be a security against every thing of the kind in future; let me therefore entreat, my dear Mrs. Stevenson, that you will never renew the subject.

MARTHA.

I thank you, my dear Madam, for your delicacy, in softening, by so gentle an epithet, the heinous crime I have committed; and for your wish to draw a veil over my guilt; but you wou'd have slight grounds to hope for my reformation, cou'd I consent to shelter myself under it: — the only reparation in my power is, to acknowledge my fault with deep regret, and throw myself on the goodness and generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Denizen, my aunt, and yourself — if you can pardon me, be assured it shall be the study of my whole life, to regain the paths of rectitude, and to be guided implicitly by that maternal friend, whose counsels I have hitherto so foolishly slighted.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

The mind that can thus nobly resolve on acknowledging and repairing an error,

is more entitled to admiration, than deserving of reproach.

MARTHA.

Alas, your goodness only adds poignancy to my self-condemnation; nor cou'd I blame you, shou'd you henceforward bar your doors against a wretch, who might, but for Divine interposition, have filled up the measure of your woes, by depriving you of a husband.

Mrs. DENIZEN. (*Starting.*)

Gracious Heaven! what can you mean?

MARTHA.

The story of Amelia's being with my brother, though not invented by me, was communicated by my pen to Mr. Denizen, at the instigation of a wicked servant.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

How often have I lamented her improper influence over you! but is it possible she cou'd extend it so far, as to make you wantonly sport with the peace of your friends?

MARTHA.

Nay, probably, with the life of one of them, though a thought of that kind never tortured me, till I found (*turning to Miss Johnson*) you were returned alone, and that Mr. Denizen was gone on: the whole train of possible consequences then rushed at once upon me, and deprived me of that reason I have so shamefully perverted.

CHARLOTTE.

Indeed, there was but too much cause for your alarm, if you thought my father

went with an intention to bring back his ward: Mr. Stevenson once in possession of such a prize, was not likely to resign her.

MARTHA.

My greatest fears arose from Mr. Denizen's supposing that my brother had circulated a false report injurious to Miss Johnson's character, and that he was gone on to charge him with it, the consequence of which would probably have been fatal to one or both of them.

AMELIA.

You may set your mind perfectly at ease for the personal safety of both.

MARTHA.

Praised be the gracious power, who has preserved them; and rescued me from falling into that dreadful abyss of misery into which I was precipitating myself! Never will the

impression, I trust, be effaced from my memory, but operate as a constant check to restrain me from future error. And O, reject me not, my dear aunt, condescend to be again my counsellor and guide, assist my endeavours to regain my forfeited good name, and you shall find every precept obeyed with that deference which is due to your wisdom and goodness: and when by penitence and amendment I have atoned for my misconduct, may I not hope to be restored to the esteem of these my injured friends?

Mrs. DENIZEN.

(Taking her by the hand.)

To with-hold it, my young friend, would be a greater reproach to ourselves than it could be to you; your self-condemnation, and laudable resolutions, at once exalt and justly entitle you to our warmest love and esteem.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Never has my heart tasted so pure a joy, since the death of my dear sister, as at this moment; you have made ample amends for every anxious hour I have experienced on your account. Come to my arms, my dear girl, my fondest hopes are now realised—that my Martha wou'd, in the end, prove herself worthy of the excellent mother who gave her birth. You are, I dare say, equally impatient with the rest of us for some account of Miss Johnson, if she will favour us.

MARTHA.

No one can be more so.

Miss DENIZEN.

I did not think any thing cou'd have arrested my attention a moment from that subject, but admiration of Miss Martha, seems to have suspended every other faculty.

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Why did my Amelia leave those friends by whom she knew herself to be so tenderly beloved?

AMELIA.

Spare me the pain of repeating, and yourself the anguish of hearing what must rack every nerve. Promise me never more to plead for Mr. Stevenson, and I will, on my part, promise never more to leave you: this is all I can with propriety say.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

The subject must be a most distressing one to all, but let not delicacy to us impose any restraint, it is impossible for any one to feel more indignation against him; and my nieces and self were resolved, had we found you were uninformed of his demerit, and inclined to pardon him, to have undertaken the painful, but equitable task of apprising you of it.

Miss JOHNSON.

Mrs. Stevenson in this, as in every other instance, preserves that greatness of soul, and love of rectitude, which must endear her to all who know her. I am apprised of every particular by Mr. Bridges, at the request of our dear departed friend, just before he expired: but silence will best become me; the flattering partiality of this circle, will readily induce them to believe that I have just grounds for the resolution, never voluntarily again to see Mr. Stevenson.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

But why, my love, cou'd you not have made this determination known without absenting yourself?

Miss JOHNSON.

Louisa wou'd not suffer me to speak decidedly against him; to her commands

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and wishes I never cou'd give a negative ; but to own the truth, I was unwilling to explain to her my reasons for rejection, besides which I feared, if he received it from me in this house, and till I cou'd at the same time assure him, you neither knew of my writing or residence, he might suppose I was acting under the influence of my guardian, and wou'd thence harbour a resentment against him, that might prompt his implacable and fiery spirit to some new rashness, utterly destructive of the remains of that peace he has already so deeply wounded.

Miss DENIZEN.

Are you sure that his faults have not been exaggerated ?

ELIZA.

I wou'd there were a doubt ! Urge not another word in his favour, lest you compel a sister, to whom he was once so dear, to

become his accuser, and to expose those faults, over which the generous Amelia seeks to draw a veil.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Neither her judgment or generosity have ever yet been questioned, let us not, therefore, distress her, or ourselves, by inviting an explanation irksome to all, and degrading to a character who once aspired to the honour of being husband to my adopted child, my amiable Amelia.

Miss DENIZEN.

I will silently acquiesce in your determination, assured of its justice. But where did you retreat to, and how came my father to meet with you?

AMELIA.

To my good Mrs. Norris, who was my companion and friend, rather than my

nurse: I knew I shou'd not only be a welcome guest, but that my retreat must remain unknown as long as it was necessary, she having lately left this neighbourhood, and gone to live with her daughter at a village near Chatham: I made my wishes known to her, and she attended with a chaise at the end of the garden wall, and conveyed me to her house: I was amusing myself with nursing her grand-child, a lovely baby, when the sound of Mr. Denizen's chaise, followed by Thomas, drew my attention; the thought instantly occurred that he must be in pursuit of me, I therefore, instead of retreating, (which I might have done unperceived,) called out. Thomas no sooner saw me, than he galloped off, overtook the chaise, and brought his master back with him. As soon as an ecclaircissement had taken place, finding he had an estate in that neighbourhood, and business to transact, I prevailed with him to go on,

and let me return, to which he reluctantly assented; promising to be at home himself early to-morrow evening.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Can you not send to prevent their sitting up for you, and favour us with your company for two or three days? Our domestic circle will be very incomplete without you; and Mr. Denizen will be impatient to assure Miss Martha of that friendship to which she has established so just a claim.

MARTHA.

Was it not my fixed determination to model the whole of my future life by the example and precepts of my truest friend, I shou'd dread the interview; but, convinced as I am of Mr. Denizen's humanity and benevolence, I despair not of his

acceptance of my apology, when accompanied with the assurance of my sincere contrition, for all the trouble and uneasiness I have occasioned him.

Mrs. STEVENSON.

Cold must that heart be, and insensible to virtue, that cou'd resist: Mr. Denizen will do more, he will love, he will respect you. Not to swerve from rectitude is a subject for praise; but thus nobly to regain the path when lost, by a victory over ourselves, is an effort truly heroic.

Mrs. DENIZEN.

Much more so than many of the boasted achievements of those heroes, whose conquests have extended every way, except over their own passions and vices; but we are apt to make erroneous estimates, and to be more attracted by specious than by

solid advantages; particularly in our ideas of felicity. "Calm and retired tranquillity is the happiest state of man, yet is that a state which is never envied," though certainly best adapted to our natures; high and exquisite gratifications exhaust and weary without affording real enjoyment. Though the splendid illusions of happiness that flattered us a short time since are vanished, much good still remains: let us not then foolishly over-rate the blessings we have lost, and regard with culpable indifference those that remain. By misfortune, my dear children, your minds have been elevated, and you have supported the trial nobly: but the excess of prosperity might have proved a more dangerous enemy; for it too generally opens a door for the vices, and, at their entrance, real happiness retires. Let us then wisely derive

satisfaction from the reflection, " that
" misfortune has always some attendant
" advantage, but the ill use of good for-
" tune has no such source of consolation."



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